

Insight and Outlook

Lansdaleism

By Joseph Kraft

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THANKS TO Sen. Dirk-
son and civil rights, we are
all aware of the "power of
an idea whose time has
come." But what about
the power of an idea
whose time is passed? Well,
it finds current expression in the
much discussed mis-
sion of Maj. Kraft.
Gen. Edward Lansdale to
Viet-Nam.

Gen. Lansdale is a figure out of the era of bitter cold-war confrontation between two monolithic systems. In 1954, after the French defeat in Indochina, he helped President Ngo Dinh Diem set up a South Vietnamese regime based on support of the military and of armed Catholic communities resettled from North Viet-Nam. Later he helped President Ramon Magsaysay and the Philippine army rout a Communist-dominated insurrection.

Given that past, Gen. Lansdale has always commanded the support of the cold warriors in Congress, notably Sen. Karl Mundt and Thomas Dodd. Since 1960, they have repeatedly talked up the notion of his taking the South Vietnamese in hand once again. At one stage, the idea was that he would go out as No. 2 man to another cold warrior of the past, the former Adm-

ral, and extreme right-winger, Arleigh Burke.

EVEN IN Gen. Lansdale's present assignment, as adviser to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, the hand of Sen. Dodd is present. Because the Ambassador in his first tour of duty in Saigon had figured in the deposition of President Diem, the Senator was furious when his reappointment to the Saigon post was announced. As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, he was in a position to embarrass both Ambassador Lodge and President Johnson. It is a good guess that the Lansdale mission is, in part at least, a way of buying Sen. Dodd's acquiescence in the Lodge nomination.

Good results, of course, can flow from seedy beginnings. But the central fact is that the Lansdale approach is not only an old approach; it is an approach that bears increasingly less relevance to the problems of Viet-Nam.

The essence of the Lansdale doctrine is that a nationalist army can be trained to filch, on behalf of the free world, a revolution that is being used by the Communists for their purposes. The instrument for this stealing of the enemy's clothes is what Gen. Lansdale calls "civic action."

Under civic action,

besides fighting the enemy, the army also helps the underlying population through such projects as building roads and schools and improving health, education and economic conditions. In this way, according to Gen. Lansdale, the national government, the army, and the general population become wedded together in an anti-Communist, "pro-people fight."

THE LANSDALE philosophy, unhappily, is not confirmed by experience—even in the two places where it was tested. In Viet-Nam, the pro-people fight lost momentum and became a family fief as soon as President Diem was established in office. In the Philippines, the pro-people fight faded as soon as President Magsaysay died. Now, the Philippines is a prime candidate for the role of the next Viet-Nam.

A technique that did not work in the past, moreover, is now burdened in Viet-Nam with a severe new handicap. The central and sustaining force in Viet-Nam today is not the Vietnamese army, still less the Vietnamese government. The central force in Viet-Nam today is the American force with its planes, artillery and big battalions.

With Americans running the show, the prospect that a revolutionary current of idealism will somehow transform the South Vietnamese government and army is obviously diminished. The tendency, on the contrary, is for the Vietnamese to let the white man do the fighting, while they gobble up economic aid and other goodies.

The history of the last four years alone teaches that the more Americans are on the spot, the more the Vietnamese are corrupted. Already, in fact, former strongman Nguyen Khanh seems to have rejected an invitation by a member of the Lansdale team to give

up his luxurious exile in Portugal for resumption of sterner duties back home.

Like it or not, furthermore, the American style of fighting is not the style of "civic action." The American style is to pound the enemy with heavy doses of bombs, shells and other destructive weapons. In these conditions, probably the best that "civic action" can do is to add a tiny touch of humanity to the harsh face of war.

GEN. LANSDALE'S hope is that the American forces will themselves become deeply engaged in civic action in Viet-Nam. In a recent article he cites President Johnson and summons the Americans in Viet-Nam "to make this war a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity." He speaks of the Americans out there as "today's Kosciuskos, Von Steubens and Pulaskis."

Personally, I find a difference or two between the modern American soldier and the Polish international revolutionary of the 18th Century. But if Gen. Lansdale is right, if his hopes are realized, then so much the worse. For if the Americans somehow convince themselves that they have a crusading mission in Viet-Nam, then there will be added one new obstacle in the only path that can lead to peace—the path of compromise and negotiation.

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